

REFERENCE SERIES: Transportation in Connecticut

ARTICLE NO. 07 FHWA Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program

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This simple guide provides insight on how Connecticut administers the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program, including providing sources of additional information on the program. The article focuses on the program funds typically available to local project administrators (LPAs).

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Overview

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a federally established program. The passage of the federal transportation bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), effective October 1, 2012, provides for the program to continue through federal fiscal years (FFY) 2013 and 2014, although set aside funding is no longer available for the program.

The Department of Transportation (Department) received approximately \$13 million in total SRTS funding for federal fiscal years 2005 to 2012. Of the total funding received to date, over \$8 million in infrastructure funding has been awarded. The new federal transportation bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), continues to provide states with the option to fund the SRTS program with funding made available under the Transportation Alternatives (TA) apportionment.

The level of funding available under MAP-21 may differ from past years since MAP-21 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding is shared by three non-motorized transportation programs: the SRTS Program, Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and the Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program. Additionally, the SRTS program is no longer 100% federally funded, and is now subject to a local match for infrastructure projects.

As federal guidance and rulemaking becomes available, the Department will be able to share more information on any changes to the program. In the meanwhile, this article provides information on the program's general structure and gives insight into how the process for project solicitation has worked in the past.

Regardless of funding levels, the Department remains committed to non-motorized transportation users and initiatives that support their safe access and passage. The Department intends to continue its efforts to assist with the development and implementation of these projects to the best of its ability given reduced funding levels and changed options under MAP-21.

Program Objectives

The program objectives are:

- to enable and encourage school children (Grades K-8), including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school;
- to make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age; and
- to facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

Website and Special Events

Local project administrators (LPAs) are encouraged to visit the SRTS website (www.ctsaferoutes.org) for additional information on the program as well as special events. For example, LPAs can receive program updates through Facebook and an email discussion group. The site provides information on international, national and state sponsored events relating to SRTS, such as Walk to School Day. A Walking and Biking Safety Toolkit is also available from the site with safety tips, program development resources, and classroom resources.

Eligible Applicants

Any state, local, and regional agencies, federally recognized tribes and political subdivision (school boards, school districts, etc.) are eligible to apply for SRTS funds. Non-profit organizations can apply through a political subdivision. The political subdivision assumes responsibility and accountability for use and expenditure of federal funds. Public or private schools with Grades K-8 are eligible. Schools with higher than Grade 8 that also include any of Grades K-8 and directly benefit from existing SRTS programs are eligible.

SRTS Master Plan

A comprehensive program is established through development of a SRTS Master Plan. A Master Plan should be created involving a team representing different aspects of the school community. This team may include parents, teachers, school administrators, neighboring residents, traffic engineers, Department of Public Works and Public Safety and local government representatives. The team works through a process to identify areas of concern or need, and then prioritizes activities and projects. The SRTS Master Plan should address the following “5 E’s”:

- **Engineering** – Identifying operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and establish safer and fully accessible crosswalks, walkways, trails and bikeways;
- **Education** – Teaching children about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills, and launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools;
- **Enforcement** – Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure traffic laws are obeyed in the vicinity of schools (this includes enforcement of speeds, yielding to pedestrians in cross walks, and proper walking and bicycling behaviors), and initiating community enforcement such as crossing guard programs;

- **Encouragement** – Using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling; and
- **Evaluation** – Monitoring and documenting outcomes and trends through the collection of data, including the collection of data before and after the intervention(s) whereby collected parental surveys and student tally sheets can be entered online or sent to the National Center for Safe Routes to School for scanning and analysis. Information is available from at www.saferoutesinfo.org/data.

Guidance for developing SRTS programs and plans are available online at www.ctsaferoutes.org, under “Getting Started” and on the National Center for Safe Routes to Schools website, www.saferoutesinfo.org. Sample SRTS master plans are also available online for reference.

Infrastructure Program Funding

Under the MAP-21 law, the infrastructure program will become an **80% federally funded cost reimbursement** program managed through the Department. **A 20% local match of funds will be required.** Grant awards are made through a statewide competitive process. Eligible costs are generally limited to those costs directly associated with the construction of approved projects.

Eligible Projects and Costs

Infrastructure projects for which funding is being sought must be included in a pre-existing SRTS Master Plan. Eligible infrastructure projects must substantially improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school and must be located within approximately 1-mile of an eligible school. It is recommended that project costs range from \$150,000 to \$500,000.

Some eligible project activities include the following:

- sidewalk improvements, including connecting neighborhoods to new schools;
- traffic calming and speed reduction improvements;
- pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements;
- on-street bicycle facilities;
- off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities;
- secure bike parking, and
- traffic diversion improvements in the vicinity of schools.

Projects must be designed to American Association of Highway and Transportation Officials (AAHSTO) standards, the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Device (MUTCD), and AASHTO Design Guidelines for Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities, and all other federal, state and local standards. Projects must also be designed to conform to the latest American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

Eligible infrastructure project costs include construction and construction engineering services. A portion of the awarded funding for each project will be utilized to repay the Department's expenses for oversight and materials testing during the construction phase. The project sponsor will be responsible for the total project cost upfront and submission of periodic invoices for reimbursement. Funding will be capped at the amount awarded, and project sponsors are responsible for any costs over the capped amount. The Department reserves the right to reject the use of other federal and/or State funding sources within the limits of any awarded SRTS project.

Ineligible Projects and Costs

The following types of projects and costs are **not eligible** to be reimbursed by the Department's SRTS Infrastructure Program:

- Preparation of a pre-existing SRTS Master Plan and application for infrastructure funding;
- Costs incurred prior to receiving FHWA project authorization (if project is awarded funds);
- Awarded SRTS funding used as a match for other federal funding programs;
- Projects that reorganize pick-up and drop-off areas for the convenience of drivers;
- Improvements or new parking facilities for motorized vehicles (visitor or faculty parking lots);
- Improvements to bus stops;
- Construction projects which are to be implemented greater than one mile away from an eligible school (Grades K-8);
- Construction projects which are not associated with a SRTS Master Plan;
- Construction projects that are strictly for the purpose of connecting schools to facilities other than neighborhoods such as recreational facilities or parks; and
- Funding for sidewalk construction to accommodate new school developments — bike and pedestrian considerations should be part of the design and construction of these developments and not an afterthought.

Post-Evaluation Documents

Applicants awarded SRTS infrastructure funds must submit post-evaluation documentation to the Department's SRTS coordinator within one year after project completion. Documentation must show the effects of project on the school walking and bicycling population. Failure to submit this documentation will preclude applicants from applying for future SRTS infrastructure funding.

Project Solicitation

An application package with guidelines is made available online at www.ctsaferoutes.org for interested parties at the time of solicitation for projects, along with applicable reference materials. These materials provide additional pertinent detail on the process and should be referenced before applying for funds.

The Department is currently working diligently with award recipients from the most recent solicitation to implement projects. Typically, solicitation for projects is initiated during the spring of every odd year with applications due in early summer. It is unknown at this time when the next solicitation will occur.

MAP-21 has affected non-motorized transportation funding levels and match rules for the SRTS program. The Department anticipates that infrastructure projects will continue to be funded for SRTS initiatives with an approved SRTS Master Plan. However, the approach for financially supporting these projects may change.

The combination of smaller SRTS projects with already planned larger projects in the vicinity, particularly complete street initiatives, will be encouraged. Alternative funding sources, including innovative financing, and split funding, whereby multiple federal aid sources are applied to a single project, are several options under review. Additionally, the Department is also considering a pilot for infrastructure projects that address improvements on a school district-wide basis in an effort to achieve greater efficacy.

Other Notes and Resources

The information in this article is provided as a first step in understanding the transportation planning, development, design and implementation process. Many topics focus on elements particularly relevant to locally administered transportation projects. The full detail of the process, particularly rules of eligibility, special provisions, requirements, or constraints is not within the purview of this reference document. It is imperative that municipal staff contact their RPO early in the process for guidance.

In addition to the CT DOT website at www.ct.gov/dot, the Local Project Administration website of the University of Connecticut's CTI-Technology Transfer Center provides many resources for municipal staff and managers of local projects: www.t2center.uconn.edu. Other articles in the Reference Series: Transportation in Connecticut are posted at the Department's website and can be located by navigating to Publications > Pamphlets.

Article No. 12, entitled "FHWA Transportation Alternatives Program", may also be of interest. This simple guide provides insight on the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). This article focuses on the legislative changes affecting the structure and funding for several non-motorized transportation programs.

Connecticut...On The Move!

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This simple guide is a product of coordination between the Federal Highway Administration, University of Connecticut's CTI-Technology Transfer Center and the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation.

v. 1.2—January 2013